



Senator **Brad Benson**

6th Legislative District

2006 Session Newsletter

Spring 2006

Please keep in touch:

By mail:

106B Irving R. Newhouse
Building
PO Box 40406
Olympia WA 98504-0406

By e-mail:

Benson.Brad@leg.wa.gov
(Be sure to include your
name, address and phone
number)

By phone:

(360) 786-7610

Via the legislative hotline:

1-800-562-6000

Web Site:

[http://www1.leg.wa.gov/
Senate/SRC/Senators/
Benson.htm](http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/SRC/Senators/Benson.htm)



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 60-day legislative session for 2006 has come to an end and I am pleased to be able to report the results to you.

Some of the big issues this session were outlined in our Republican Commitment to Washington. Despite being in the minority, House and Senate Republicans were able to get many aspects of our Commitment passed. We turned some bad bills into good ones and helped make some good bills better.

As your Senator, my job is to represent and protect taxpayers in my district. This year I opposed an unsustainable operating budget. The budget grew by 17 percent over the last biennium, an unprecedented growth of state government. Because of overspending, we will likely go from a \$1.65 billion budget surplus to a \$400 million deficit in one year, resulting in massive spending cuts or tax increases. The budget also ignored our pension funding responsibility. Despite spending at record levels, we skipped our current requirement to pay \$275 million into the retirement fund. We now have a \$4 billion unfunded liability in our pension system. It's important that we create sustainable budgets that prioritize state needs within finite resources.

I supported the 2006 capital construction budget. It stayed within available resources and funded some construction that is very favorable to Spokane. It also includes a Columbia River Basin Water Supply Development program which will help agriculture in Eastern Washington, provide start-up funds for a Washington biodiesel industry, build a state-of-the-art crime lab, and provide \$63 million for WSU.

I also supported the 2006 transportation budget that provided money for needed emergent transportation issues in Eastern Washington while staying within our available resources.

I look forward to continuing to work hard for you in the State Senate and I thank you for all of your support. It continues to be an honor and privilege to serve you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Brad Benson in black ink.

Brad Benson
State Senator, 6th District

Unsustainable Budget



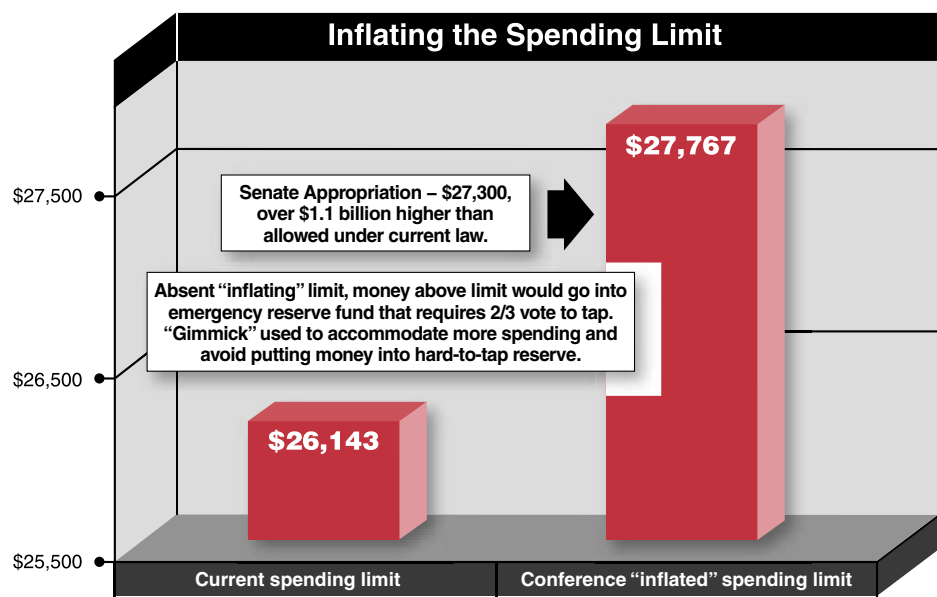
This year, the Legislature approved the largest spending increase in state history, ignoring voter-approved spending limits and raising expenditures by 17.4 percent over the previous biennium. This will cost each Washington family an additional \$2, 592 to support state government. The majority party also rejected a proposed “Rainy Day Fund” which would have required the state to save money when there is a surplus (like this year) for use when the state has a deficit (as we will likely see next year).

Current law permits additional spending of approximately \$180 million in this year’s supplemental budget. Unfortunately, the budget spent significantly more than that. The budget bill, SB 6896, creates three new “reserve” accounts.

These are not savings accounts; they are more like checking accounts. By creating new accounts for current spending, the budget increased overall spending by taking major expenditures outside the budget. Ironically, the money put into each fund isn’t enough to cover current expenditures, let alone leave any savings.

Budget writers can’t have it both ways, taking credit for putting funds in reserve while artificially inflating the legal spending limit. Some have long complained that the restrictions on tax increases under I-601 (which places a limit on expenditures out of the state’s general-fund) may be

(continued on next page)



unconstitutional. Recently, several groups challenged the legality of the fund shifting and just received a ruling from a Snohomish County Superior

Court judge. The judge ruled the 2005 operating budget violated the provisions of I-601, and “exploited a loophole with the express purpose of artificially



increasing the limit.” The loophole found and exploited by the Legislature was not small. In effect, by transferring money to separate accounts – not once, but twice – it gave the appearance

of spending money and therefore artificially raised the spending lid for the budget, giving lawmakers the go-ahead to raise taxes without a vote of the people.

Something is fundamentally wrong when – during a healthy and growing economy – the state’s largest reserve in history is spent in one budget, leaving nothing for next year or inevitable future economic downturns.



Taxes, Taxes, Taxes



Taxpayers in Spokane are experiencing large increases in local and state taxes.

Our real estate taxes are increasing because property values are increasing. While it’s good to see property values increasing, it isn’t much help to fixed income individuals who simply want to stay in their homes.

Utility rates have also increased drastically, while local utility taxes and sales tax are also going up. Gas taxes are going up, an assortment of sin taxes have been increased, and the state has created a new death tax that unfairly burdens individuals and small business owners.

As I have already said, my focus in the Legislature is to represent and defend taxpayers. While I have consistently opposed these tax increases, I am equally concerned with the runaway spending that necessitates digging ever deeper into taxpayers’ pockets.

I will continue to oppose tax increases in Olympia.



Some Good Policy, Too

As you can see, I'm not pleased with the budget. Some major policy decisions were made this year, however, of which I am very supportive.

The **Odessa aquifer** in North-Central Washington has been drying up at an alarming rate. Republicans have attempted for a number of years to establish an off-stream water reservoir system which would preserve water during the runoff months for use in our dry months. We finally had a bipartisan breakthrough this year and have established the Columbia River Basin Water Supply Development program which will preserve water resources and take pressure off the aquifer.

We have been in the throes of partisan debate over **medical**

liability reform for years.

Washington has been one of the friendliest states to sue doctors, and thus one of the least friendly states for doctors to practice. Liability insurance for certain doctors in Washington is three times the cost of other states. This deadlock resulted in two initiatives last year. Voters rejected both initiatives. I'm happy to report that we agreed to a bipartisan tort reform bill this year that moves the state in the right direction. While it isn't everything I was hoping for, I believe this was the first step in an effort to make our state competitive on liability issues.

We passed **tougher sex offender legislation** to protect our most vulnerable citizens. Predators will now go to prison for 25 years

and face tougher post-release registration and supervision requirements. Unfortunately, some of the toughest bills weren't passed.

I have sponsored a **felony drunk driver bill** for years. We have been one of only a few states in the nation without a felony option for prosecutors to take repeat drunk drivers off our roads before someone gets seriously injured or killed. While the bill that passed this year, sponsored by my seat-mate Rep. John Ahern, was a watered-down version of our original bill, it was a step in the right direction. Rep. Ahern and I are committed to continuing our work to improve this new law and keep our roads safe for your families and ours.

PRSR STD
US Postage
PAID
Olympia, WA
Permit #133

**Senator
Brad Benson**
106B Newhouse Building
PO Box 40406
Olympia, WA 98504-0406